



SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

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The challenge of this Synod is to learn to journey better together, listening to the Spirit, to become a more synodal Church, with the goal of proclaiming the Gospel in today's world. The importance of the ecumenical dimension has been emphasized from the very beginning of the Synod. The Preparatory Document proposed dialogue with other Christian denominations as one of the 10 themes to be explored during the local consultation phase (it was theme 7). Then Cardinal Grech and Cardinal Koch stressed in their joint letter that "dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by a single baptism, occupies a special place in the synodal journey" because synodality, like ecumenism, is a process of walking together. As Pope Francis has also said on several occasions, there can be no synodality without ecumenism and there is no ecumenism without synodality.

This perspective led to the decision to hold an ecumenical prayer vigil on Saturday, Sept. 30 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. in St. Peter's Square. This time of prayer stems from a dream expressed by Brother Alois, the prior of Taizé, at the opening of the Synod on Oct. 9, 2021. The idea put forward by the Taizé Community was discussed with the General Secretariat of the Synod and with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, who proposed to organize the event on the eve of the opening of the Synod. The project was then presented to Pope Francis, who decided to schedule and preside over it just before the Synod.

A number of leaders of different Churches and Christian communions will participate in the prayer vigil, as well as members of the XVI^e Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, who will then depart that same evening for the *Fraterna Domus* in Sacrofano for a 3-day spiritual retreat before the Opening Mass of the Assembly on the morning of October 4. The ecumenical prayer vigil on September 30 is open to all the People of God, and will highlight two fundamental aspects of the synodal process: the centrality of prayer and the importance of dialogue with others to go forward together on the paths of unity and fraternity in Christ.

In this light, the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil has the following aims:

- To emphasize the centrality of prayer in the synodal process, which is a spiritual process.
- To emphasize the articulation between the synodal path and the ecumenical path,

which all documents of the synodal process have highlighted. Synodality and ecumenism are two paths to be traveled together. The commitment to build a synodal Church has numerous ecumenical implications. (cf. *Instrumentum Laboris* B1).

- To emphasize the key theme of commitment to unity and peace in our world, which is weighed down by so many divisions.
- To give a strong sign of the importance of prayer for the unity of all those baptized in Christ and to entrust the work of the Synod to the Holy Spirit together.

Many leaders and representatives of the different Christian traditions will participate in this Ecumenical Prayer Vigil, including:

- from the Orthodox Churches: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople; Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem; and a representative of Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria;
- from the Oriental Orthodox Churches: Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignatius Aphrem II; Mar Paulus Benjamin representing the Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East; and Archbishop Abune Ermias, representing the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church;
- from the historical Protestant communions: Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, Rev. Anne Burghardt, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, and the Old Catholic Archbishop Bernd Walleit;
- from the Evangelical-Pentecostal Communions: Rev. Thomas Schirrmacher, General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance; Rev. William Wilson, President of the Pentecostal World Fellowship; and Rev. Kuzipa Nalwamba, representing the World Council of Churches.

On a special note, those twelve Church and Christian Leaders have been invited to lead the prayer vigil together with Pope Francis. Some Fraternal Delegates sent by their Churches to the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will also speak.

After a time of welcome in St. Peter's Square with different choirs and a procession, the program for the prayer vigil will unfold in two parts. Firstly, a Pre-Vigil time from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. with four expressions of thanksgiving, interspersed with songs, on the gifts that God gives us and the responsibility that comes with them. After each of these, some testimonies will be presented.

Then from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil with Pope Francis will take place, involving an introduction by Pope Francis, an opening prayer by Patriarch Bartholomew, some readings from the Word of God, a time of silence, and intercessions

read by a Church/Christian leader or fraternal delegate to the Synod. We will then pray the Lord's Prayer together, introduced by Archbishop Welby, followed by some words from Pope Francis. Finally, a concluding Prayer and Blessing by Pope Francis and all twelve Church/Christian leaders, for the Synod participants and for everyone.

In conclusion, I would like to mention how young people have a particularly important role to play in and for the Synodal Church. World Youth Day in Lisbon gave us a glimpse of synodality in action, and listening to young people during this period has underscored this point. Young people aspire to this style of a welcoming and fraternal Church, where unity in diversity can be experienced.

To enable young people to participate in this important time of prayer to entrust the work of the Synod to God, the Taizé Community and many others took the initiative to organize a weekend gathering in Rome. This gathering for young people aged 18 to 35, which is also called "Together" since the Together prayer vigil is an integral part of it, will now be presented to you by Brother Matthew. I would like to conclude by expressing gratitude and thanks in particular to Br. Alois, Br. Matthew and Br. Luc, as well as the whole Taizé Community with its young volunteers and the many partners from all the Churches, not to mention the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, who have all been involved in preparing this event for many months.

This Prayer Vigil and the Together Gathering are the fruit of a wonderful collaboration in a very synodal style. In the words of Pope Francis, "the path is made by walking." This unique and prophetic event, open to all the People of God in their diversity, can demonstrate how the mission of the Church is to be a communion that radiates outward, to manifest to the world what is at stake in moving forward together, working for the unity of humankind.